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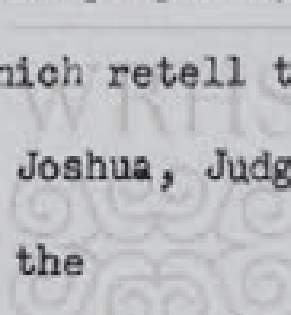
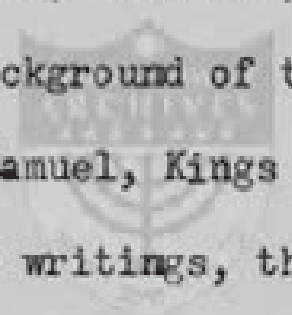
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Women's Association, lecture series, Bible Study Course, "Sing
Unto the Lord - Psalms," notes and speech, 1965.

TWA BIBLE STUDIES - 1965 - October 13

Session #1
"Sing Unto The Lord" Psalms

Welcome to Bible 1965 A. Last year we delved a little bit into the history, the beginnings, the background. This year I'm reversing myself and I'm dealing with the last books of the Bible, I'm dealing with complete Books of the Bible. Psalms, Proverbs, Job and Daniel. No public relations intended. The Bible is, in our tradition, divided into three sections. I know that some of you can't see it but I wrote them on the board earlier. The Torah, which we usually think of as the whole Bible or the scroll in our ark but which is actually only the first five Books, the five Books of Moses - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The section known as Nevihm, which is the Hebrew word for Prophets, which include the designated prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc. and also the historical in books which retell the background of the days in which the prophets taught and wrote Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings and then a conglomerate book, or section known as the , the writings, the holy writings, which included the poetry, the Proverbs, the wisdom literature - Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and a review of history Chronicles. All the books which we are going to touch are from the third of these sections, the . This is a broad and definition. Almost each book is an anthology or a library and they're fascinating. They are also the books of the Bible which can be read by you with the least amount of historical information required. They read pretty well straight off and they read without any necessity to place them in their time or their place.

Now the Book of Psalms is both the most popular section of the Bible and the most difficult to lecture on. Most of the psalms stand on their own feet. By that I mean, it matters little if you know when they were written, within one century or of another, whether they were written by a Judean, a man from the south,

or by an Israelite, a man from the north - whether it were written under the monarchy or in the exile or after the return from the Babylonian captivity. Certain psalms express moods, ordinary human emotions. These moods and these emotions are innocent, direct and they speak to us across the ages. Typically, my God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Why art Thou far from my help at the words from my cry. Oh my God I have called by day but Thou answers not, and at night and there is no for me, yet Thou art holy. I chose this paragraph because this morning I walked into the Temple, and there seated before the ark,

 , was a lonely woman. She was quiet, introspective, looking neither at the ark nor at the temple. She was worried and I suspect beyond worry and I suspect somehow she found strength and faith in the presence of God and I suspect she could have written these lines. Other poems in the Book of Psalms express other pieties and other feelings, the familiar categories of hope and of confidence. We can make tarry for the night but with the morning there is joy. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable unto Thee oh Lord, my rock and my redeemer. And still other sections of the Psalms simply set down in unforgettable poetic form the basic truths of human life. We bring our years to an end, is a tale that is told - the days of our years are three score years and ten or even by reason of strengths and four score years. Yet is their pride but and vanity for it is speedily gone and we fly away. So teach us oh Lord to number our days that we may get us a part of wisdom. Time is our one possession and use of time our one discretion. I was asked just two days ago, if Jews in biblical days actually lived for three score years and ten and the four score years. We've heard so much about the miracles of medicine and about the lengthening of the life span and it's true. But the life span has been lengthened from the ill health and the diseases and the plagues of the middle ages. And the rather clean air and the open country and the desert around Israel, men lived as we live today. From seventy to eighty years, this was the normal span of life. It was only when men insisted on cooping themselves up into

Roman cities, in living in their own filth and their stench and their illness and in their contagion that human life became short and as brief as it was, as it is still today in a country like India. The Psalms recall then, neither archeology nor really a knowledge, an intricate knowledge of history to be appreciated, but they require is a sensitivity to language. You've got to love the spoken and written word. You have to love symbol and metaphor. A language can mean one thing on the surface but shimmering off that surface there are all kinds of colors and shapes and use and meanings. Finally, you have to have a sharp sense of your own mortality and your own frailty. By and large adolescents find the Psalms sticky, square. It's not that they don't appreciate the language, or the honesty of emotion in most of the psalms. It's rather the simple fact that they've never been to a funeral that they have no sense that they are not ~~unlike~~ like unto the Gods, immortal. And really they've had no need to pray. All you have to do is turn to Mother and say "Please", and that's enough. They don't know what it means when the psalmist says that he walks in the valley of the shadow of death. They don't know what it means to be frightened by the arrow that flyth by the day and by the pestilence that walketh at the noon day and by the destruction that wasteth in the darkness. The first human emotion, the first emotion to which we respond is the emotion of love. The first book which young people, especially adolescents respond to is the Song of Songs which is simply a collection of the wedding poetry, the love poetry of our people. Since it's a beautiful fall day and I don't want to be morbid, let's begin with a little bit of the poetry, the talking of poetry, the Bible, the kind of poetry you won't find in the Psalms but typical of Hebrew poesy, a verse or verses from the Song of Songs. Let me read it to you. Don't follow it, don't look at it, just enjoy it. The worst thing to do with the Psalms, by the way, is to get too stickly with the language. You have to feel it, just enjoy, listen - "I am a rose of Sharon, A lily of the valleys. As a lily among thorns, So is my love among the daughters. As an apple-tree among the trees of the wood, So is my beloved among the sons. Under its shadow

I delighted to sit, And its fruit was sweet to my taste. He hath brought me to the banqueting-house, And his banner over me is love. Stay ye me with dainties, refresh me with apples; For I am love-sick.' Let his left hand be under my head, And his right hand embrace me. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, By the gazelles, and by the hinds of the field, That ye awaken not, nor stir up love, Until it please.' Hark! my beloved! behold, he cometh, Leaping over the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young hart; Behold, he standeth behind our wall, He looketh in through the windows, He peereth through the lattice. My beloved spoke, and said unto me: 'Rise up, my love one, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, The rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth; The time of singing is come, And the voice of the dove is heard in our land; The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, And the vines in blossom give forth their fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.'" Well to any young man who has dreamed of serenading his loved one with the watussi and with some beat music, the loved one, the fair one, she who is to come away with him, convinces him that the Bible isn't quite for dried up and people only. We've outgrown that and we know that there are other ranges of human emotion, which need to be expressed, other poetry which the heart instinctively feels and it is this other poetry, which is expressed in the Book of Psalms. Poetry of divine love. The poetry of human decency. The poetry of the loneliness of age. The poesy of the anguish of faith and of the fear of death and our uncertainty of facing the future. You must be prepared, able to have sensed these moods, if the psalms are to touch you in the deepest places of your soul. In touching in any poetry, the most that any instructor can do is to place the material in its context. Tell you what we know about the applicable terms of the art, suggest the reach of the symbols and let the literature speak for itself. If you have no love of the bizarre and the mysterious, The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner remains a strange and rather awkward tale. If you have no empathy with the despair and the loneliness and the outreaching and the prayer and the hope and the search of life, perhaps

the Psalms will fail to touch you. Although they have a magic and they weave their magic and their magic has a way of reaching out and drawing us in, into its terms. Now there are a hundred and fifty psalms in our present collection, but not all of the psalms, not all of the hymns of the Bible are to be found in this one Book. We're told in the Bible, the story of Hannah. Hannah was a fine woman but a childless woman and she prayed to God for a child and she promised God that if a child were granted her she would dedicate that child to the Temple, he would be in the ministry of the Lord. A child was born, a child who was in turn to become Samuel. Next to Moses, the next great leader of our people. The Bible tells us that once Hannah had received the child, she came to the sanctuary and she offered up there a hymn of praise to God. I'd like to read that hymn with you. It is a psalm, Hannah did not write this psalm, she simply remembered one of the wonderful pious melodies of her people which to a degree reflected what she was feeling, or someone else put this psalm in her mouth. But, it's very typical of this poetry and a good place to begin. Turn to the first Book of Samuel, turn to chapter 2 - if you have a Jewish Publication Society Bible, you will probably find it on page 326, but that's the coward's way out. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges - Samuel in chapter 2. "And Hannah prayed, and said: My heart exulteth in the Lord, My horn is exalted in the Lord; My mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; Because I rejoice in Thy salvation. There is none holy as the Lord; For there is none beside Thee; Neither is there any rock like our God. Multiply not exceeding proud talk; Let not arrogancy come out of your mouth; For the Lord is a God of knowledge, And by Him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty men are broken, And they that stumbled are girded with strength. They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; And they that were hungry have ceased; While the barren hath borne seven, She that had many children hath languished. The Lord killeth, and maketh alive; He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich; He bringeth low, He also lifeth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, He lifteth up the needy from

the dung-hill, To make them sit with princes, And inherit the throne of glory;
For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, And He hath set the world upon them."
Now this psalm is obviously the psalm of a poor man or a humble man or a man against
whom the wheel of life has turned, who has had bad fortune - who looks about him and
sees people he does not like, the wicked flourishing, and he praised God because he
says that he has faith, that God will somehow right the balance. He killeth, and
maketh alive; the baren woman bears and she with many children languishes. The
full have to hire themselves out for bread, have to become slaves, the hungry cease.
Now it's simply the illusion to the baren woman who has seven children, which
probably led the author to put this prayer in the mouth of Hannah. But what we
have here is an emotion. It does not hold water, if you examine it critically.
There is no such balance in life between wickedness and punishment, goodness and
reward. This is a problem, by the way, that the Book of Psalms deals with constantly.
You find exaggerated feeling in the Book of Psalms and you'll find this line. "I
was a young man and now I have grown old and I have never seen a good man who has
been forsaken. Well, it's not true. It's on the face of it, not true. But these
men were talking themselves into faith. They were working themselves into an
experience and understanding, a confidence in God. This, most troubling of all
problems, why do the righteous suffer? What is there stumbling block? They try
to overcome it in a sense by brain-washing themselves that this was not in fact so.
There is a cadence to this language. My heart exalteth in the Lord. My home is
exalteth. My horn is exalteth in the Lord. This is the enthusiasm and the thrust
the vigor of the faith. Many of the psalms then can be criticized as we examine
them critically, but they must be understood as the expression of human beings, of
the Hannahs, of a person who suddenly and wonderously has seen life come right.
Here after many childless years, she suddenly had a child. And how often in our
human experience, there is this sudden reversal of fortune and the intensity of
emotion breaks out from us. We exaggerate what we feel for good or for hurt and
the psalm, in a sense, is that exaggeration - that statement of the heart. I started

with this psalm because it proves that not all of the psalms, not all of the hymns or all of the poetry in the Bible of biblical days was included in the final editing of the Book of Psalms. As a matter of fact, we have found in the last few years, a number of psalms in the material and in the parchment which has come to us from the Dead Seas, scroll people, which are not at all in our Bible, which were unknown until they were rediscovered. In other words, there was a treasury, many such poems which circulated in biblical days, and an anthology, a collection of these was made and finally agreed upon and canonized. You will find as you leaf through the Bible, in strange places, psalms - Jonah recites a psalm in the middle of whale, when he's been cast overboard and the whale swallows him up, all of a sudden he breaks out into song and he ~~says~~ praises God for allowing him, of all things, to sacrifice in the Temple of Jerusalem. The psalm has no relevance to the story except that the ~~imagery~~ ^{imagery} of the psalm is that of a man who has been cast into the depths and out of the depths finds somehow again his faith in God. The Hebrew title of this anthology (Hebrew) which means literally "songs of praise". Hannah's prayer is a classic example the . Psalms of praise, psalms of laudation. Not all of the poetry is of the type of Hannah's prayer and our book has long sported another name, the Book of Psalms or the . It was so entitled by Egyptian Jews who first translated the Bible into Greek in the second century before the Common Era, about twenty-two hundred years ago. They called it , after a heart, with which the troubadours of the day accompanied themselves as they sang these hymns. And this is important because all of this poetry meant to be sung and the line of the language is meant to be , it is brief because the voice can only carry so many notes before it must pause for a breath. It emphasizes the noun and the verb, rather than long strings of adjectives and adverbs. It is direct rather than obtuse. It is simple rather than . It is meant to be sung, to be sung in accompaniment with an instrument or any number of instruments and we have in the Book of Psalms, as a matter of fact, indications of a number of these instruments which were used - the harp, the timbrel, the cymbal, bells, trumpets, string instruments of all kinds and others. The

was chosen as its title, the Book of Psalms because of an ancient tradition found in our Bible, which knew ~~that~~ ^{of} King David, as an expert in singing and in the playing and because of equally ancient tradition found in our Bible that King David was the author of at least seventy-three of these one hundred and fifty pieces. If you open the Bible to the Book of Psalms, turn to psalms three, four, five. You'll see a super-scripture. Almost as if you had a book title, or program note. Under psalm 3, first line "A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son." They give us actually an historical identification. Four - "For the Leader; with string-music. A Psalm of David." - Five - "For the Leader: upon the Nehiloth." Some kind of musical instrument, "A Psalm of David." Six - "For the Leader; with string-music; on the Sheminith", some other kind of instrument, "A Psalm of David". So at least in the second century before the Common Era, we have an indication by whoever edited this collection that David was believed to be the author of a majority, or close to a majority, of this material. The question which we must ask is whether this subscription can be accepted as fact. Let's analyze the tradition, first off. The rather confident historian of the first Book of Samuel tells us that Saul, the first King of Israel, not unlike our own Abraham Lincoln suffered from deep moods and melancholia, from black depression. Lacking psychiatrists, the ancients hired troubadours and musicians to distract them, to exercise the devils to calm them. It was almost cheaper, I think. We'll have an indication of how this came to be in the case of David. If you turn to first Samuel, chapter 16, beginning in verse 14, we have a rather simple story told us. "Now the spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord terrified him. And Saul's servants said unto him: 'Behold now, an evil spirit from God terrified him. ~~And Saul's servants said unto him: 'Behold now, an evil spirit from God terrified him.~~ Let our lord now command thy servants, that are before thee, to seek out a man who is a skilful player on the harp; and it shall be, when the evil spirit from God cometh upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well.' And Saul said unto his servants: 'Provide me now a man that can play well, and bring him to me.' Then

answered one of the young men, and said: 'Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Beth-lehemite, that is skilful in playing, and a mighty man of valour, and a man of war, and prudent in affairs, and a comely person, and the Lord is with him.' Wherefore Saul sent messengers unto Jesse, and said: 'Send me David thy son, who is with the sheep.' And Jesse took an ass laden with bread, and a bottle of wine, and a kid, and sent them by David his son unto Saul. And David came to Saul, and stood before him; and he loved him greatly; and he became his armour-bearer. And Saul sent to Jesse, saying: 'Let David, I pray thee, stand before me; for he hath found favour in my sight.' And it came to pass, when the (evil) spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took the harp, and played with his hand; so Saul found relief and it was well with him, and the evil spirit departed with him." In other words, David was the victrola, and the long playing record which soothes our tired minds, and more than that, he was the musical distraction which could sooth the terrifying spirits, the fears and the anguish and the loneliness. David becomes King of Israel in effect because his mother told him to practice the piano. We have then, an historical tradition, an ancient tradition, that knew David as a skilful musician. When Amos, two hundred years after David's death, wanted to and specify those who were and therefore were to be condemned, he chastized them in these terms - Those that lie upon beds of ivory, mattresses are too thick, those who stretch themselves upon their couches and eat the lands out of the flocks, and the out of the midst of the stalls, those that thrum upon the sultry, those that devise for themselves instruments of music, liked David. This tradition of David as a harpist, of course, has remained with us. You see it in Jewish art, you see it in some of the biblical pictures of Mark , you will see it on the windows of our chapel. You look on the windows in the chapel, you'll notice a harp - three or four stringed harp with a crown above it, in each of four panels. This harp with the crown above it is a traditional Jewish symbol. It refers to David and to his authorship of the psalms. So much so was David known as the patron of music that when the biblical biographer put a last speech into his mouth he

concludes in this way. Now these are the last words of David, the saying of David, the son of Jesse, and the saying of the man raised on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob and the sweet singer Zion. So David becomes not only the king, not only the great monarch of our people, the founder of the dynasty, but the sweet singer of Zion. The authorship of these ~~th~~ seventy-three psalms, remained unquestionably David's until two or three generations ago, when for the first time scholars began to question, as they did all tradition, this particular tradition. Some argued from David's character. David was ~~in~~ pictured in our Bible as a professional soldier, as a warrior king, a genius in . Danger and violence seemed to rub out and to make brittle and vulgar the subtler ranges of human emotion. Many argued that a man of such violence and such anger and such crudeness in his political life could not be the authors of such subtle and exalted poetry. This argument gave rise to a delightful bit of , which expressed these doubts. King Solomon and King David lived very wicked lives, with half a hundred concubines and quite as many wives. But when old age came creeping in they were filled with qualms. So Solomon wrote the Proverbs and David wrote the Psalms. Now what do we argue wives, wine or war. The argument is not conclusive for whatever college professors may feel about generals, all of them are not hard-nosed tin soldiers. We have an example of Alexander the Great, who was both philosopher and poet and conqueror of the world. We have the example of , who was both philosopher and Caesar of all Rome. We have a rather literate example of some of our own generals and their biographies and the materials that they wrote coming out of the last war. Indeed this line of reasoning was not the major criticism advanced by the scholars. Twenty years ago it was generally believed that all that was exalted and universal and most noble in the Bible was a rather late arrival on the biblical scene. Biblical critics were applying Darwin's theories of evolution to the world of ideas. It fitted the realities of such science as there was at the time and it fitted rather neatly, the Christian confidence, that what is later is better and therefore the New Testament, being later, is better than the Old.

At one point some scholars dated all of the psalms in the second century or third century before the Common Era. Almost eight hundred years after the death of King David. The rude, early Hebrew, they argued, could not have had such exalted thoughts. He could not have mastered the intricacies of the poetic discipline. However this argument from evolution has been shattered, and rather completely so, in the last twenty years by fact and the facts come largely from archaeology. Archaeologists began to uncover at a place called _____, which is in Syria, a library of materials written in the fifteenth and sixteenth pre-Christian centuries, which showed a competence in language, a control of the forms of poetry which is equal to that in our psalms. In other words, seven hundred years before David, it was possible for the people in this area to use Hebrew meter, to express noble thought, and to have no reason to believe that these language tools were unavailable to David in his time. There was also the argument that some of the language in the psalms is late. Some of it reflects what we call _____, the _____ tongue which became the prevalent tongue of the Jews in the second and first century before the Common Era, which was a tongue spoken by Jesus and his disciples. We have now found that _____ was spoken by Jews way back in the sixth and seventh and even in the eighth century before the Common Era and this argument too, has gone by the board. We also now know that the sectarians who lived at the Dead Sea knew of these psalms and knew of them to be ancient, which means in the second century before the Common Era, the psalms were already known as venerable and old. And, finally the whole attitude of criticism which sees monotheism and universalism entering Judaism only with the exile of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, has been shattered as we have seen more and more that Moses and Samuel came to almost the same ideas. Does this mean that David was actually the author of these psalms? Probably not. It means that they were written, or could have been written in the time of David. It means that David could have written some of them but it also means that ancient poets, knowing that papyrus and parchment was scarce, knowing that their poetry was not likely to pass muster and be remembered through the generations in various

~~editions~~ editions, unless they could add to it the name of a royal author. In all probability, ascribe to their poetry the authorship of the king who was the sweet singer of Zion.

We cannot tell whether David authored any or all or some of these psalms. He could have authored some that come from his period of history, at least many of them, but we can only say that David was known in ancient times as the royal patron of the hymn, of the psalm, and let it go at that. Can any of the psalms be dated? Will this help us in our search for understanding? Very few. The language of the psalms is the literate language of biblical days, the language which was spoken from the days of the Judges down to the days of the end of the Bible. Only a few psalms give us from their inner-context, an indication of when they were written. Let me cite one or two for you and see if you² come good historians over the past year. Turn to Psalm 126 - "When the Lord brought back those that returned to Zion, We were like unto them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, And our tongue with singing; Then said they among the nations: 'The Lord hath done great things with these.' The Lord hath done great things with us; We are rejoiced. Turn our captivity O Lord, As the streams in the dry land. They that sow in tears Shall reap in joy. Though he goeth on his way weeping that beareth the measure of seed, He shall come home with joy, bearing his sheaves." Can you think of a moment in biblical history which this would fit? Ruth - it almost sounds like Ruth, but the captivity "When the Lord brought back those that returned to Zion", the first line. The great exile of our people took place in the year 586. The Babylonians came down, they burned the Temple, they raised Jerusalem, all of the middle class and the noble class was taken into exile. It was as if Israel had never been. Then in the year 516, Cyrus, king of Persia, Persia had in the meantime conquered Babylonia, allowed the Jews to begin to come back and to rebuild and this psalm obviously comes from this period of return and rebuilding. Begins in a sense, of exaltation of that moment that is now at hand - "Then was our mouth filled with laughter, And our tongue with singing". So here we have indication of a psalm which is late, rather than early, it gives

a good indication of a composite nature of this book. One more - Psalm 137 -

'By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down, yea, we wept, When we remembered

Zion. Upon the willows in the midst thereof We hanged up our harps. For there they

that led us captive asked of us words of song, And our tormentors asked of us mirth:

'Sing us one of the songs of Zion.' How shall we sing the Lord's song In a foreign

land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, Let my right hand forget her cunning. Let my

tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, If I remember thee not; If I set not

Jerusalem Above my chiefest joy." This psalm is ~~written~~ obviously ~~in~~ brought back

by the people from the exiles. A psalm which somehow kept them going, kept them

alive, kept up their confidence - "Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, If

I remember thee not; If I set not Jerusalem Above my chiefest joy". Those of you who

know the traditional Passover , know that through the long

centuries of and dispursion and exile, the Jews of Medieval Europe

recited this psalm as part of the story. This brought it up to date.

They were again in exile. They were again being mocked and scorned - "If I thee not,

O Jerusalem". Again the hope of Zion burnt within them. But having said that,

we've about dated the psalms that can be easily dated and the rest are left as a fine

collection of poetry which must be read and understood by itself. Now there's one

other inner-division within the Book of Psalms. The Book of Psalms is divided into

five parts. Each of these parts ends with what we call a doxology, a brief few line

mention of the many attributes in the greatness of God. The division of the five

sections is probably late and artificial. Only the first three sections seem to

have a continuity, seem to have a shape to them. Probably the final editing of the

Book of Psalms attempted to duplicate the editing of the Torah. There were five

books in the Torah so there would be five books in this cherished liturgy, in the

worship book of our people. But we know that many selections of psalms, many

parchments of psalms in odd forms and not in their present number existed. We found

some among the Dead Sea peoples. All we can say is this - that the Book of Psalms

printed in short lines the page rather than verse as now. There are a number of

is an anthology of anthologies. You'll find, for instance, in the Book of Psalms, we just read one, fourteen psalms which are listed as Psalms of Ascent. There are psalms which we know from the , to have been sung by the pilgrims, as on Succoth time and at Passover time. They brought the harvest with them from their farms and their communities to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is up in the hills and these were the songs of ascent that they sang along the road, much as our boy scouts sing as they tramp along happily on their hikes. In this case it's not² pack and the den and the group spirit which is involved, it's their coming to God to offer Him gratefully Thanksgiving for the harvest. There are a book of psalms which are called the - means hallelujah, praise. We recite these psalms ~~xxx~~ also on the great pilgrimage festivals. Praise oh ye servants of the Lord, Praise ye the name of the Lord, Praise ye the name of the Lord from this time forth and forever, . There are a group of psalms which are ascribed to a group of priests, known as the . We know nothing more about them except this name. They seem to be liturgist and by that I mean they seem to have been composed and written directly for the sacrifice and the ritual of the Temple. In some of these psalms we can almost sense the way in which they were used in the ancient Temple. More of that in a minute. What we have then is a collection, an anthology of anthologies and to add to the confusion its patent that some of the psalms are themselves a composite of a number of psalms. At this point you get into scholarship and we stop. You will find in the psalms great beauty and some rather prosaic language. You will find some fine philosophy and some very mundane thinking. You will find theology, which is innocence, naive and theology which is and academic. In other words you'll find a reflection of almost every kind of human being of every attitude towards faith. Now before we move on, we need to say a word or two about Hebrew poetry. What are its laws? What are the rules? How is it put together? What should we look for? What makes it poetry? It's simply not as much a modern English poetry. The fact that it's printed in short lines/^{down} the page rather than across as pros. There are a number of

and canons of Hebrew poetry and I'd like very quickly and as simply as I can to explain them to you. If you will turn to psalm 145, you'll notice down the left hand column, the Hebrew alphabet (Hebrew) This kind of psalm is called an , by we mean that every line of the psalm began with a subsequent letter of the alphabet. In medieval Hebrew poetry, the author often hid his name in this way. He would write out his name, down the page and then write lines across the page and if you read the first letter of each line you will know his name. In other words his authorship could never be separated from the psalm itself. The cruder form of this is psalm 145, which takes the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet and gives you a Praise of God based on each letter. Some psalms have a partial alphabet, some psalms repeat the alphabet a number of times. This kind of psalm is usually the most prosaic and in the Book of Psalms. It is an artificial form, artificial on the surface of it, and if we the ability of the man to express himself and it's obvious that he wrote this as a literary enterprise rather than in the heat of feeling in the innocence of emotion. In any case, you will find a number of these in the Bible. Then if you will turn to psalm 114, I think I can explain to you very quickly, the basis of Hebrew poetry. When we think of poetry, we think of rhyme and we think of meter. You have to take both these terms and put them aside for a moment in this description of Hebrew poetry. The Jews did not use rhyme because rhyme was too simple for them. Hebrew is a language which uses roots and adds the endings both on nouns and on verbs on adjectives and adverbs to these roots. So it's very easy to take any idea and make it rhyme. You can rhyme endlessly in Hebrew, there's no trick to it. So they avoided rhyme except when it was inevitable. The meter we simply cannot express because we don't know the stress of Hebrew as it was spoken in those days. Instead of we do know this about Hebrew poetry. In the first place, the basis of poetry was what they call parallelism. Two ideas or two lines which were intimately related to them. Notice: "When Israel came forth out of Egypt, The house of Jacob from a people of strange language;".

Same thought varied - "Judah became His sanctuary, Israel His dominion." Same idea different words. "The sea saw it, and fled; The Jordan turned backward." - same. "The mountains skipped like rams, The hills like young sheep. What aileth thee, O thou sea, that thou fleest? Thou Jordan, that thou turnest backward?" Again the same. "Ye mountains, that ye skip like rams; Ye hills, like young sheep? Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, At the presence of the God of Jacob; Who turned the rock into a pool of water, The flint into a fountain of waters."

So the first principle is what we call parallelism and the lines either compliment one another or provide an exact parallel to each other or are to each other - "weeping they carry through the night, For with the morning there is joy". Or they may be climactic, building up ^{to} a climax. The law of the Lord is perfect, Restoreth the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, endearing forever. Behold the good doctrine has been given unto you, forsake it not. We don't know why parallelism was so important. It may have been that it was easier to memorize, one idea suggested its mate. It may have been a way to bring out the full and the subtlety of its thought. In any case, parallelism is the basic building block of Hebrew poetry. And it's not all so simple as in the psalms, sometimes it will be four lines which are contrasted, which are parallel, or ~~it~~ there may be whole paragraphs which are parallel. But you'll notice in most of this poetry that parallelism is the dominant motif. Finally you will notice that there is a certain rhythm, or stress to the language. Let me read you this psalm in Hebrew. I don't expect you to understand every word but you've read the psalm and I think you'll get a little bit of the sense of the language. (Hebrew)

Now you have heard many of these psalms, you understand their structure best really when you hear them in an old time, because they were written to be sung and singing brings out the emotion which is written into every word, which a spoken voice never does, or ought to do for instance, as that sense of trembling, of dancing, of motion and a good trill in a baritone's voice can bring it out and it is probably in this way that it was sung a long time ago. Now the

absence of rhyme in a complicated metrical scheme has this virtue for ~~it~~ us. That no one has tried to force the psalms in translation into an archaic and complicated metrical scheme which destroys the meaning and beauty of the language. By and large the psalms have been well translated and because they emphasize so much the building blocks of the nouns and the verbs, they come over to us and we can understand them as they are. If we cannot know when most of the psalms were written we do know why they were written or at least how they were used and I'd like to read to you very briefly, not from the Bible but from a second century book of The Wisdom of Ben Sira which describes a service by a high priest in the Temple in Jerusalem.

"How glorious he was when the people gathered round him as he came out of the inner sanctuary! When he put on his glorious robe and clothed himself with superb perfection and went up to the holy altar, he made the court of the sanctuary glorious. And when he received the portions from the hands of the priests, as he stood by the hearth of the altar with a garland of brethren around him, he was like a young cedar on Lebanon; and they surrounded him like the trunks of palm trees, all the sons of Aaron in their splendor with the Lord's offering in their hands, before the whole congregation of Israel. Finishing the service at the altars, and arranging the offering to the Most High, he reached out his hand to the cup and poured a libation of the blood of the grape; he poured it out at the foot of the altar, a pleasing odor to the Most High, the King of all. Then the sons of Aaron shouted, they sounded the trumpets of hammered work, they made a great noise to be heard for remembrance before the Most High. Then all the people together made haste and fell to the ground upon their faces to worship their Lord. And the singers praised him with their voices in sweet and full-toned melody. And the people besought the Lord Most High in prayer before him who is merciful, till the order of worship of the Lord was ended; so they completed his worship." We had then in the ancient Temple, professional choirs, much as we have here. We had also a professional orchestra which we generally lack here. These professional choirs were situated in appropriate niches and alcoves in the Temple and all of the ritual actions of the

priest before the sacrificial altar and all the actions of the congregation as they brought their offerings and they came to prayer, were accompanied by appropriate music. Now some of the moments must have been very dramatic. We've just completed Yom Kippur and we know that in time the end of Yom Kippur day, as the people would file out from this magnificent building, from its open courtyards, the choir and the orchestra of the Temple would situate themselves on the wall, the outside wall, in the East gate, through which everybody left, and as the people would leave, they repeated one by one, the musical themes of Yom Kippur. Then as that final was sounded, which we heard, which gives us a thrill, the gates of the Temple would just lock shut, closed and that was it. So what we have is a very dramatic and a very beautiful form of worship and we know very often the exact psalms which were sung on particular occasions and our prayer book took over these psalms and we still read them day by day as they were read in the ancient Temple. We also know how congregation choir came together, the origin of our responsive reading. Turn to psalm 136. I think I can take you back in the biblical days, I'll be the choir and you be the congregation and you have to know three words (Hebrew) For His mercy and your . Now say it. There were no prayer books in those days, so all the congregation could be entrusted with was simple responses and this was one of them. The choir, the baritone lead would give you the guide line to which you would respond (Hebrew) . Let's try it. "O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good," Response. "O give thanks unto the God of gods," response. "O give thanks unto the Lord of lords," response. "To Him who alone doeth great wonders," response. "To Him that by understanding made the heavens," response. "To Him that spread forth the earth above the waters," response. "To Him that made great lights," response. "The sun to rule by day," response. "The moon and stars to rule by night," response. (Hebrew) , but I hope you get the point. The choir keyed the service, and in this praise of God, which is simply an extended list of His creative wonders a new thought was

realize that we are reading lines which were written perhaps 2500 years ago.

thrown out to which the people simply responded like Amen (Hebrew)

In brief, the Book of Psalms is an anthology. It's an anthology of the liturgical poetry of our people. This poetry was used as part of worship in the Temple. It is still used as the major part of worship by the Jewish people. If you are to take even our Union Prayer Book, our Reformed liturgy, and you were to separate out sentence by sentence, you would find that about sixty percent of the language is directly taken from the Book of Psalms. In the traditional service, the proportion may go even higher. The Book of Psalms, was not however, uniquely written for the liturgy. Many of the materials in the Book of Psalms were written as ~~private~~ expressions of feeling and then this poetry was taken over by the service and by the priests for their own purposes. Some of it is as old, perhaps, as the ninth and ten century before the Common Era. Some of it is perhaps as recent as the second or third century before the Common Era when this Book was finally . Each psalm is in its own way, a gem. I've given you the skeleton and the structure and I hope, after a question period, to give you one psalm in its depth and its meaning. So I think what I'll do is to pause now and let you ask the questions which are on the tip of your pencils if not the tip of your tongues and then we'll go on from here. Question - Because the Hebrew word doesn't say it, but it's obviously the meaning of the sentence. Question - His Mercy forever, forever His Mercy. I hope you never forget those three words.

Now what I want to do with you is talk about the most familiar psalm of all, the twenty-third psalm and much of what I have said, and more, I have written up in a little pamphlet, which will be ready I hope, by our meeting next week. The 23rd Psalm is known to all of you, probably known by heart by most of you. It's possibly the best known poem in literature. For those who enjoy a vigorous faith, the psalm's piety fits words to feeling. To anyone who is at all sensitive, these verses express a strengthening which a steady faith permits. The verses are simple and honest. The language is as simple as the appeal is immediate. As we say it, it's hard to realize that we are reading lines which were written perhaps 2500 years ago.

"The Lord is my shepherds; I shall
not want.
He maketh me to lie down in
green pastures;
He leadeth me beside the still
waters.
He guideth me in straight paths
for His name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the
valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
For Thou are with me;
Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me
in the presence of mine enemies;
Thou hast anointed my head with oil;
my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall
follow me all the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house of
the Lord forever."

Now to translate is to do violence. No translation fully matches the original. The familiar rendering of this psalm, which so many of you were saying under your voices with me, has a comfortable grace and is by and large faithful to the Hebrew. Its major fault, for us, is that it trips too lightly off the tongue. We respond to the cadence but we rarely really think about the meaning. I've tried a new translation, not so much to be an improvement, but to make you think, give you a pause for ~~re~~ reflection. Perhaps ~~xxxxxxxx~~ the unfamiliar idiom will give these lines a new vigor and allow them to be heard.

God is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He gives me rest in green pasture.
He guides me by the restful waters.
He refreshes my soul.
He directs me along straight trails for
His name's sake.
Even when I pass through the valley
of ominous shadows
I am not frightened for You are with me.
Your club and your staff calm me.
You provide for me ever if there are
enemies about.
Your care exceeds all expectation.
My cup overflows.
Truly, a generous goodness will pursue
me all the days of my life
And I shall be with God as long as I live.

This Psalm, however we translate it, breathes a pastoral air. We associate it with open spaces, solitude and that much-abused "peace of mind." The image is of the clean and peaceful outdoors which harried city folk long for and imagine to be the perfect bliss. The professional herdsman who knows the tedium, the bite of the weather and the sudden attack of the ~~predator~~ animal, the predator, probably has other dreams. But it doesn't matter. The question is not whether the bucolic is, in fact, bucolic but whether the poem succeeds in evoking a mood of buoyant and strengthening faith. I think it does. In purely literary terms these verses pass muster. Even if we never have experienced a faith which refreshes the soul, as we read these lines we know its reality and that is the acid test of any bit of poetry.

This poem is an idyll. Its striking appeal rests in every man's ever-present longing for the security and the encouragement which it suggests. Over the ages many have read into these lines perhaps more than they promise. You will find commentaries which would relate this Psalm to a Messianic redemption, and of every possible manner of personal good fortune. Conversely, the young and the exuberant often dismiss this Psalm as exaggerated, if not innocent. A careful reading of the text makes it clear the poet is neither an enthusiast nor naive. Faith may brighten each day and lighten the load but the purest of saints suffers infirmity and heartache. God's blessing is bountiful but each day has its close and each day its ominous shadows. There are enemies about. The familiar English "Thy rod and Thy staff comfort me," unfortunately blurs a deliberate subtlety through which the poet has deepened his pastoral image. Rod and staff are synonyms, in English, which describe the shepherd's crook - that long curved stick ~~with~~ with which he guides and manages the flock - but that does not end the matter. In the Bible "rod" is used as an allusion to the darker side of life, "the rod of My anger." The Psalmist suggests in the single line three separate ideas. (1) The sheep settle down comfortably within sight of the shepherd's staff. They cannot speak but the familiar crook informs the flock this is their guardian and not a stranger. The human flock is calmed and quieted by the presence of God. We somehow feel more

secure within sight of our Temple, "the visible presence of God in the midst of the people." When our world shudders about us we retreat instinctively to the sanctuary. Recall the throngs who came the day President Kennedy was assassinated. And, finally to the man of faith, the bitter in life is also a part of Divine wisdom. He has come to accept whatever each day holds. "Thou dost not willfully afflict the sons of men." The poet does not expect to find heaven on earth. The miracle to which he thrills is that he can walk on the wild side, this side of heaven, without trepidation.

Judaism defines atheism as the affirmation "there is neither judgment nor Judge." Atheism accepts creation as a chemical accident and life as a biochemical fact which we must accept with as much grace as possible. The atheist can be and often is a fine human being but his universe is cold, void and unrelenting. The Biblical faith, which this Psalm capsules, denies the emptiness of space and the vanity of birth. Man is not alone. "The Lord is my shepherd." God is the spiritual presence within the universe. Argue with this faith if you will, it is after all a matter of faith, but recognize its strengthening power and recognize that it has brought coherence and moral conviction to human civilization.

The Psalm is cut of homespun cloth. Some find God in the majesty of infinite space. Some find God as they trace human progress. Some find God in the promptings of the still small voice within the conscience. The poet seems to have found God almost without looking for him. It was not enough for him that there are hopes that do come true and joys that can be realized. "He gives me rest in green pasture, he guides me by the restful waters." It is true that to live is to be bruised, but it is equally true that joy often comes with the morning. Those who paint life in black and grey distort its image. There is the gentle breeze as well as the hurricane.

Hebrew poetry has much in common with modern blank verse. As I said, it makes no pretense at rhyme, and though it reveals a certain rhythm and stress there is no attempt to fit the language into a complicated metrical pattern. Hebrew poetry depends upon three canons. It was written to be sung and melody imposed upon the

language a certain cadence and roll. The language used was carefully chosen, precise, and symbolic. It conjures up known images. (Shepherd, Pasture, Still Waters, Staff..) but uses these as metaphor and symbol. Finally, as we have indicated, Hebrew poetry proceeds by a combination of phrases by parallel.

"The Lord is my shepherd
I shall not want.

He gives me rest in
green pasture.
He guides me by the
restful waters.

The vocabulary of Hebrew poetry is deceptively clear. "The Lord is my shepherd," suggests God's concern, His solicitude. The image is drawn from everyday life, but the meaning is not exhausted with the statement 'God cares.' The shepherd and his flock are of different species. God is other than man even as the shepherd is quite other than his flock - more powerful, wiser, a protector from another order of existence. Sheep must wonder in some sheeplike way at the extraordinary skill of their guardian even as man is awed by the wisdom and protection of his God. The mere presence of such a protector allays the everpresent fear.

I am afraid that the 23rd Psalm has become something of a set piece for us. We hear it predictably at a funeral service and we pay scant attention to it. This Psalm was one which our people recited in illness or the presence of death. We know ourselves then to be in the valley of oninous shadows and we need the encouragement of the God who comforts and is ever near. Note, however, that this Psalm makes no promise of immortality. Our dead are with God. The pain is ours and not theirs. As revealed by the Kaddish and so much else which our tradition associates with death, Judaism's concern is to the feelings and needs of those who have been left behind. Some there be, I am afraid, who prejudge a funeral service and who assume that it is an ancient propitiatory rite in which men ask God to take special care of their loved ones. It is no such thing. God made man a partner in the affairs of this world but God needs no help in arranging the eternal matters. A funeral service is for us the living not for the dead. It is designed to bleed our grief of some of its sting. It is designed to free us of any lingering sense of guilt. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins nor requited us according to

our inequities." Death is a natural end to life. Our dead are with God. The loss and loneliness is ours as is the need for a renewal of faith. Lacking all artificiality the encouragement of this Psalm provides good and welcome medicine for the soul. When dark days are about us we need its hope.

I may be wrong, but I know something of the author. I know him as a deeply disturbed man whose faith does not run on as serenely as these verses seem to indicate. We speak of faith when we need faith. When the sun shines we take faith for granted. This man wrote this verse to renew his courage. In the writing his courage was reborn. "Truly a generous goodness will pursue me all the days of my life and I shall be with God as long as I live." I have the feeling also that the author felt his faith surge up and become certain, even as he knew that his language was exaggerated, hyperbolic. No one in the shadowed valley believes in endless good fortune. Who of us is really comforted when life knocks us about or when we are really compelled to take the lonely hike across the dark valley? There is something plaintive in the concluding verse which can be read: "Would that goodness and mercy would follow me all the days of my life." He knew that he must die. He knew that to love is to lose and to live is to be bruised. There is no promise here of endless health, unbroken pleasure and a handsome annuity. There is only the promise that God is near. The House of the Lord is not a sorcerer's den in which base metal is transformed into gold, illness miraculously healed, and where we can drink of the fountain of eternal youth. The Temple is a place where men and women worship. There is no magic here, only a sense of the nearness of God. In the House of the Lord there is that faith which strengthens and men of faith have always believed that they possess the most precious of gifts of all.

I thought you might be interested in a number of brief comments made by the medieval writers as they developed the thought of this poem. Briefly, let me give you one or two and I'll conclude with these. - At least one commentator developed Hebrew political theory on the basis of this Psalm. "The Lord is my shepherd." With these words the greatest of Israel's kings submits to an authority that his cannot match. Hebrew theory accepted the principle of monarchy but denied the

king absolute or free-wheeling power. David and his successors were constitutional monarchs in the sense that their rule was legitimate only as long as they conformed to the terms of God's law. If they transgressed this law they forfeited their legitimacy. Hebrew piety includes the hope that a descendent of David will again ascend the throne of Israel. At his coronation he must say "The Lord is my shepherd."

"The Lord is my shepherd." A Palestinian teacher observed that there is no livelihood more humdrum and more humble than that of the shepherd. He must spend his days alone, in the open and without the simplest of amenities. Yet the poet presumes to call God a shepherd, and, presumably, God is not all put out by his choice of language. How strange that so many choose their profession out of consideration of status.

What is significant in the humble routine of a herdsman? He spends his days protecting and caring for those in his charge. Power and rank distort our understanding of human significance. After all, what finer service is there than a ministry of concern for the simple, ordinary, everyday welfare of our family and of our community?

"I shall not want." A fastidious believer wondered about the poet's confidence: What had he done to merit God's solicitude? Surely the human sheep must do more than graze, grow fat and to be shorn. He suggested that a sad fate awaits black sheep who balk and refuse to follow the herdsman's orders and who stray from the herd, they would be gobbled up by the wolf. It would seem to follow that only one who has accepted the responsibilities of ethical living and who accepts the orders of the Divine shepherd can assume that his faith warrants God's gracious goodness. Perhaps so, but this interpreter stretched the thought of the Psalm. The poet does not presume to tell God whom he may safeguard or whom he should throw aside. This theology has merit even as the commentator's theology refracts a certain unbecoming smugness. "God's ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts." Indeed, were we to press the image the shepherd undoubtedly keeps a special watch over the more head-strong and willful in the flock.

The flock is refreshed, writes, by being set to pasture where the grass is rich and tender and near a cool refreshing stream. Transposed into human terms and image is one of tranquility, a family picnic, a quiet afternoon gardening or with a book. Yet how many of us rush from this happy quiet to the excitement of the world. Many a commentator related these lines to a verse of the Prophet Isaiah: "In sitting still and rest shall ye be saved. In quietness and confidence shall be your strength". And then Isaiah adds, "but ye would not." Man is impatient with the fireside pleasures until he is exhausted and jaded. Then, often too late, he learns the truth that true joy comes in the quiet moments and "by restful waters." So wives, remind your husbands tonight to stay home.

you hear
Well, there's many another, the hour is late and I don't want to ~~read~~ the whole pamphlet without reading it. Have you any questions on the 23rd Psalm? Question - The Bible tells us that King David was the author of the 23rd Psalm, but we don't know. Question - We need precisely the hope of the Psalm at the moment of death and of grief. If the funeral is to be honest, we must accept the fact that we have been hurt, deeply and brutally hurt and that what we need most is the encouragement the lift to carry on. This comes in the presence of friends. This comes from the sense that our dead would want us to carry on to live for a happiness they struggled to achieve for us and finally we find that the paragraphs in our literature, encourages this line of thinking. Question - The young wouldn't understand it. It would have no meaning within their terms. The valley of the shadow of death, you have to have a certain maturity, a certain grief for that. Question - All the medieval poets based their poetry on the structure of the Psalm, plus some other structures they took from Arabic poetry. Question - None except that this is one of the sounds that and you can't get away from it. It has power.
The question was - In my attempted translation I translated and said Thy rod and Thy staff, Thee comfort me - Thy club and Thy staff, these comfort me. Club has a harsh and rather brutal
because I wanted you to sense this within the Hebrew. Judaism insisted

that man must see the hand of God, even in the evil, what he believes to be evil, that occurs to him. Indeed it is probably in the bitter that we learn the greatest of the lessons in life. God instructs us through the harsher experiences and it isn't only that God protects and He provides, this is too bucolic and too untrue. There's not a person here who hasn't been hurt and cried. We know that God isn't simply the tender shepherd who will protect us from anything and everything.

the word club in c reality and I'm convinced that the author intended that reality to be , that his choice of words show that to us. Question - The Psalm doesn't really promise it. I think that the language which was used in this was excessive - really the idiom means "as long as I live". The Christian influence on Jewish life. We need a more careful translation of this last line because it does have that implication. Question - The Psalm seems to translate well into almost any language. Of course the translation depends upon the skill of the translator. There is a Jewish Bible translated in French and the Psalms read magnificiently in French. I don't know what they would sound like in German but I have a prejudice there and I probably simply wouldn't like it. for the sounds. You have to have a in a flowing language to capture it.

You've been most patient. The Psalms are worth reading, the Psalms can be read by you, by yourselves, you don't need a dictionary, an encyclopedia, a handbook of archaeology, a biblical primer of any kind. The thoughts spring out at you and everytime you read it you find something new in the Psalms. You'll find your own mood and you'll find moods which will jog you out of your own mood which is of even greater benefit.

Next week we become a little more down to earth and realistic - the Book of Proverbs, hard headed, business like, political, wise, worth the doing. I'd like to make one announcement before you leave, and this is in behalf of the women of our Women's Association who are working at the Charles Orr School, where we have built a library and where we are now staffing the reading room and by that we mean,

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall
not want.

He maketh me to lie down in
green pastures;
He leadeth me beside the still
waters.
He restoreth my soul;
He guideth me in straight paths
for His name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the
valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, I shall not
For Thou art with me;
Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me
in the presence of mine enemies;
Thou hast anointed my head with oil;
my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall
follow me all the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house of
the Lord for ever.

The 23rd Psalm is the best known poem in literature. For those who enjoy a vigorous faith the song's piety fits words to feeling. To anyone who is at all sensitive these verses express the strengthening which a steady faith permits. These verses are simple and honest. The language is as simple as the appeal is immediate. It is hard to realize that we are reading poetry written perhaps 2500 years ago.

No one knows when and by whom these verses were written. A Biblical editor, perhaps the anthologist who compiled the Book of Psalms, ascribed it to King David. Some seventy-two other Psalms were similarly attached to this ancient sovereign whose skill with harp and song established him as the founder patron of Hebrew poetry. Basing themselves on this hint medieval commentators suggested a number of crises in David's life when he might have felt the need to renew his confidence in God by writing about it. On the other hand, modern critics have had difficulty imagining this professional soldier and politically adroit statesman as one possessed of such sensitivity and peace of soul. The suggestion of David's authorship is late, possibly as late as the second century before the Common Era (David lived in the tenth century) but David's reputation as "the sweet singer of Israel" is an old tradition often referred to in the historical sections of the Bible. As a youth, David first came to the attention of King Saul when that moody and despondent man demanded a "man that can play well," who could, by music, sooth his blackest moods. Did David author this poem? Perhaps so, perhaps not. Ancient poetry was often ascribed to a royal patron in the hope that the royal name would help it escape oblivion. Even today every scrap of Presidential writing is micro-filmed for posterity. On the other hand, history abounds in active men of unexpected depth and talent. We know of Indian potentates who were successful generals and religious mystics, and of Roman Emperors who were skillful in war and astute in philosophy. Simply put, neither the language nor the style of this Psalm permits any definite dating or the naming of the writer. Fortunately, it matters little. The poem is timeless and human. It is cut of everyday cloth. It could have been written thirty centuries ago or yesterday.

Traduttore, traditore. No translation fully matches the original. The familiar rendering of this Psalm, which so many of us can recite by heart, has a comfortable grace and is by and large faithful to the Hebrew. Its major fault is that it trips too lightly off our tongue. We respond to the cadence but rarely search out the meaning. My translation, which follows, is not so much an improvement as a pause for reflection. Perhaps the unfamiliar idiom will give these lines a new vigor so that they will be heard.

And, finally, to the man of faith, the bitter in life is also a part of divine wisdom. He has come to accept whatever each day holds in store. "Thou dost say God is my shepherd, I shall not want." The poet does not expect to find heaven on our want.

He gives me rest in green pasture.

He guides me by the restful waters.

He refreshes my soul.

He directs me along straight trails for

His name's sake.

Even when I pass through the valley

of ominous shadows

I am not frightened for You are with me.

Your club and your staff calm me.

You provide for me even if there are

enemies about.

Your care exceeds all expectation.

My cup overflows.

Truly, a generous goodness will pursue

me all the days of my life

And I shall be with God as long as I live.

The Psalm breathes a pastoral air. We associate it with open spaces, solitude and that much-abused term "peace of mind." The image is of the clean and peaceful outdoors which harried city folk long for and imagine to be the perfect bliss. The professional herdsman who knows the tedium, the bite of the weather and the sudden attack of the predator probably has other dreams. It matters not. The question is not whether the bucolic is, in fact, bucolic but whether the poem succeeds in evoking a mood of buoyant and strengthening faith. It does. In purely literary terms these verses pass muster. Even if we never have experienced a faith which refreshes the soul, as we read these lines we know its reality and that is the acid test of a poetic master work.

The Psalm is an idyll. Its striking appeal rests in every man's ever-present longing for the security and the encouragement which it suggests. Over the ages many have read into these lines perhaps more than they promise. You will find commentaries which would relate this Psalm to a Messianic redemption, and of every manner of personal good fortune. Conversely, the young and the exuberant often dismiss this Psalm as exaggerated, if not innocent. A careful reading of the text makes it clear the poet is neither an enthusiast nor naive. Faith may brighten each day and lighten the load but the purest of saints suffers infirmity and heartache. God's blessing is bountiful but each day has its close and its ominous shadows. There are enemies about. The familiar English "Thy rod and Thy staff comfort me," unfortunately blurs a deliberate subtlety through which the poet has deepened his pastoral image. Rod and staff are synonyms which describe the shepherd's crook, but that does not end the matter. In the Bible "rod" is used as an allusion of the darker side of life, "the rod of My anger." The Psalmist

suggests in the single line three separate ideas. The sheep settle down comfortably within sight of the shepherd's staff. They cannot speak but the familiar crook informs the flock this is their guardian and not a stranger. The human flock is calmed and quieted by the presence of God. Man somehow feels more secure within sight of their Temple, "the visible presence of God in the midst of the people." When our world shudders about us we pray instinctively to the sanctuary. Recall the throngs who came the day President Kennedy was assassinated. And, finally, to the man of faith, the bitter in life is also a part of Divine wisdom. He has come to accept whatever each day holds in store. "Thou dost not willfully afflict the sons of men." The poet does not expect to find heaven on earth. The miracle to which he thrills is that he can walk on the wild side, this side of heaven, without trepidation.

Judaism defines atheism as the affirmation "there is neither judgment nor Judge." Atheism accepts creation as a chemical accident and life as a biochemical fact which we must accept with as much grace as possible. The atheist can be and often is a fine human being but his universe is cold, void and unrelenting. The Biblical faith, which the 23rd Psalm capsules, denies the emptiness of space and the vanity of birth. Man is not alone. "The Lord is my shepherd." God is spiritual presence within the universe. Argue with this faith if you will, it is after all a matter of faith, but recognize its strengthening power and recognize that it has brought coherence and moral conviction to human civilization.

The Psalm is cut of homespun cloth. Some find God in the majesty of infinite space. Some find God as they trace human progress. Some find God in the promptings of the still small voice of conscience. Our poet seems to have found God almost without looking for him. It was enough for him that there are hopes that do come true and joys that can be realized. "He gives me rest in green pasture, he guides me by the restful waters." It is true that to live is to be bruised, but it is equally true that joy often comes with the morning. Those who paint life in black and grey distort its image. There is the gentle breeze as well as the hurricane.

~~Perhaps a word should be said about the make-up of Hebrew poetry.~~ Hebrew poetry has much in common with modern blank verse. It makes no pretense at rhyme, and though it reveals a certain rhythm and stress there is no attempt to fit the language into complicated metrical patterns. Hebrew poetry depends on three canons. It was written to be sung and melody imposed upon the language a certain cadence and roll. The language used was carefully chosen, precise, symbolic. It conjures up known images. (Shepherd, Pasture, Still Waters, Staff...), but uses these as metaphor and symbol. Finally, Hebrew poetry proceeds by a combination of phrases or lines which are complimentary, if not synonyms.

believes in endless good fortune. He is really comforted when life knocks us about or when we are forced to take the lonely hike across the dark valley? There is something about the Hebrew verse which can be read: "Would that goodness were with me all the days of my life." He knew that he must die. He knew that to love is to lose and to live is to be bruised. There is no promise of health, unbroken pleasure and a handsome salary. There is only the knowledge that God is near. The House of the Lord is not a scribe's desk. It is transformed into gold, illness miraculously healed, and the fountain of eternal youth. The Temple is a place where men can worship. There is no magic here, only a sense of the nearness of God. In the House of the Lord there is that faith which believes that God is near.

The vocabulary of Hebrew poetry is deceptively clear. "The Lord is my shepherd," suggests God's solicitude and concern. The image is drawn from everyday life, but the meaning is not exhausted with the statement 'God cares.'

The shepherd and his flock are of different species. God is other than man even as the shepherd is quite other from his flock - more powerful, wiser, a protector from another order of existence. Sheep must wonder in some ovine way at the extraordinary skill of their guardian even as man is awed by the wisdom and protection of his God. The mere presence of such a protector allays the ever-present fear.

I have appended a few paragraphs of commentary to this Psalm and to its separate verses to draw out these suggestions. ~~As you read~~ these interpretations, which are, by the way, mostly medieval, ~~you will find~~ many an unexpected yet useful idea, and the familiar may take on a fresh beauty.

~~I do so advisedly for~~ I am afraid that this poem has become something of a set piece which we hear predictably at a funeral service and to which we pay but scant attention. This Psalm was one which our people recited in illness or the presence of death. We know ourselves then to be in the valley of shadows and we need the encouragement of the God who comforts and is ever near. Note, however, that this Psalm makes no promise of immortality. Our dead are with God. The pain is ours and not theirs. As revealed by the Kaddish and so much else which our tradition associates with death, Judaism's concern is to the feelings and needs of those who have been left behind. Some there be, I am afraid, who prejudge a funeral service and who assume that it is an ancient propitiatory rite in which men ask God to take special care of their loved ones. It is no such thing. God made man a partner in the affairs of this world but God needs no help in arranging the eternal matters. A funeral service is for us the living. It is designed to bleed our grief of some of its sting. It is designed to free us of any lingering sense of guilt. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins nor requited us according to our inequities." Death is a natural end to life. Our dead are with God. The loss and loneliness is ours as is the need for a renewal of faith. Lacking all artificiality the encouragement of this Psalm provides good and welcome medicine for the soul. When dark days are about us we need its hope.

I may be wrong, but I know something of the author. I know him as a deeply disturbed man whose faith does not run on as serenely as these verses seem to indicate. We speak of faith when we need faith. When the sun shines we take faith for granted. He wrote this verse to renew his courage. In the writing his courage was reborn. "Truly a generous goodness will pursue me all the days of my life and I shall be with God as long as I live." I have the feeling also that the author felt his faith surge up and become certain, and that he knew his language to be hyperbolic. No one in the shadowed valley believes in endless good fortune. Who of us is really comforted when life knocks us about or when we are forced to take the lonely hike across the dark valley? There is something plaintive in the concluding verse which can be read: "Would that goodness and mercy would follow me all the days of my life." He knew that he must die. He knew that to love is to lose and to live is to be bruised. There is no promise here of endless health, unbroken pleasure and a handsome annuity. There is only the promise that God is near. The House of the Lord is not a sorcerer's den where base metal is transformed into gold, illness miraculously healed, and where men can drink of the fountain of eternal youth. The Temple is a place where men and women worship. There is no magic here, only a sense of the nearness of God. In the House of the Lord there is that faith which strengthens and men of faith have always believed they possessed the most precious of gifts.

- of the world. Many a commentator related these lines to a verse of the
- * Some commentators suggest that David wrote this confident hymn after he was secure on the throne. They interpret it as a thanks giving. Others are not so sure. The history of David's reign does not indicate any period when he was free of war or of challenge to his authority. Furthermore, the verse "Even when I pass through the valley of ominous shadows" indicates that the poet is quite aware that there are and will be troubles. Now then can we explain David's obviously exalted mood? His faith had raised him above ordinary fear. "I am not frightened for You are with me."
 - * At least one commentator expounds Hebrew political theory on the basis of this Psalm. "The Lord is my shepherd." With these words the greatest of Israel's kings submits to an authority his cannot match. Hebrew theory accepted the principle of monarchy but denied the king any absolute or free-wheeling power. David and his successors were constitutional monarchs in the sense that their rule was legitimate only as long as they conformed to the terms of God's law. If they transgressed this law they forfeited their legitimacy. Hebrew piety includes the hope that a descendant of David will again ascend the throne of Israel. At his coronation he must say "The Lord is my shepherd."
 - * "The Lord is my shepherd." A Palestinian teacher observed that there is no livelihood more humble than that of the shepherd. He must spend his days alone, in the open and without the simplest amenities. Yet the poet presumes to call God a shepherd, and, presumably, God is not all put out by his choice of language. How strange that so many choose their vocation out of considerations of status.
 - * What is significant in the humble routine of a herdsman? He spends his days protecting and caring for those in his charge. Power and rank distort our understanding of human significance. After all, what finer service is there than a ministry of concern for the welfare of our family and of our community?
 - * "I shall not want." A fastidious believer wondered about the poet's confidence: What had he done to merit God's solicitude? Surely the human sheep must do more than graze, grow fat and to be shorn. He suggested that a sad fate awaits black sheep who balk and refuse to follow the herdsman's orders and who stray from the herd. It would seem to follow that only one who has accepted the responsibilities of ethical living and who accepts the orders of the Divine shepherd can assume that his faith warrants God's gracious goodness. Perhaps so, but this interpreter stretched the thought of the Psalm. The poet does not presume to tell God whom he may safeguard or whom he must cast aside. This theology has merit even as the commentator's theology refracts a certain unbecoming smugness. "God's ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts." Indeed, were we to press the image the shepherd undoubtedly keeps a special watch on the more head-strong and willful in the flock.
 - * The flock is refreshed by being set to pasture where the grass is rich and tender and near a cool refreshing stream. Transposed into human terms the image is one of tranquility, a family picnic, a quiet afternoon gardening or with a book. Yet so many rush from this happy quiet to the excitement

of the world. Many a commentator related these lines to a verse of the Prophet Isaiah: "In sitting still and rest shall ye be saved. In quietness and confidence shall be your strength, but ye would not." Man is impatient with the fireside pleasures until he is exhausted and jaded. Then, often too late, he learns the truth that true joy comes in the quiet moments and "by restful waters."

- * The Hebrew noun which we have translated "green pasture" has the precise connotation of "young and tender grass." A competent shepherd takes pains to pasture his flock where the forage is nourishing and easily edible. As Israel's most competent shepherd, God nourishes the people on a spiritual diet which they can readily digest. The Torah which he has given us does not demand super human sacrifice. Asceticism, celibacy, the turning of the other cheek, protracted fasting, none of the extreme disciplines are a part of the Biblical requirement. The Bible encourages love, family, joy, friendship, even the give and take of business. "Defraud not thyself of the good day." The Bible condemns excess, to be sure, but never man. He directs me along straight paths.. The word "straight" is a homonym. It has two meanings. The first denotes a level and unobstructed path, the kind of trail the shepherd prefers. The verse can also be read "He directs me along righteous ways. The Torah is man's God-given guidebook to the righteous way. Strange, is it not, that the right and proper decision often removes difficulty and makes life go more smoothly. We might have avoided many a bad moment if we had never told a lie, compromised principle or given in to impulse. The morally straight line is by far the easiest to walk.
- * "For His name's sake." David believed in God and served God loyally. Yet, God was not under any obligation to him. God's kindness is not by way of repayment but an act of Divine wisdom and generosity. Many foolish people believe that prayer and charity build up a credit in heaven. This is arrant nonsense. Prayer and charity are virtues and useful, but what God does He does in His wisdom. We cannot bribe Him.
- * "Even when I pass through the valley of ominous shadows." David had no illusions as to the rewards of faith. Those who advertise faith as a cure-all for any and all shortcomings or unhappiness promise too much. The man of faith, equally with the man of little faith, suffers disease, business reversal, death and heartache. What then is the advantage of faith? Simply this. "I am not frightened for You are with me." I no longer panic when the day grows dark for I have learned that God is in the tempest as well as in the warming breeze. Disease and death touch all men. The man of faith has only this advantage: he can bear the bad moments with some degree of equanimity. "For You are with me."
- * The verse, "to provide for me even if there are enemies about" is the most difficult line in this text. The familiar "thou preparest a table" is a correct literal translation, but it obviously no longer applies to the chosen image of a shepherd and his flock. If David wrote this Psalm he apparently wrote his special situation into it. The table is the banquet table of his celebration. The oil is the oil of coronation. The enemies are those who sought to prevent his great day. If the Psalm is by an anonymous commoner it is best to translate this line metaphorically "to provide for me even if there are enemies about."

In those times when an enemy attacked citizens retreated behind the high walls of their town. Weapons were rudimentary and there was little danger of an actual breaching of the walls but there was great danger of famine and thirst. The image is of a beleaguered people whom God will not allow to be starved into submission. Oil was used in ancient times not only to anoint the monarch but at the festive board as a special sign of consideration for the guests. It is as if the poet were saying: "Your care exceeds my fondest expectation."

* Note the unexpected use of the verb "pursue". It suggests that those who lead the good life find it difficult to break the habits of decency. There are times when decent people feel a need to be more self-centered. Generally they find that they cannot. It requires quite an effort of will to be gauche when you have trained yourself to be considerate. The disciplines of a lifetime are likely to stop the ugly word before it is spoken. Much as an addict is pursued by the drug even though he may long to be freed of it so the ethically addicted are pursued by goodness even if they covet a more worldly life.

* There is an ancient interpretation which assumes that David wrote this Psalm not about his personal prospect but about the fate of his people. Somehow he could foresee that Israel's pilgrimage was to be through a long valley of misery. He comforts Israel. God is near. God will provide. According to this interpretation David foresaw that a scattered and beleaguered Israel would be hard-pressed to retain its confidence. He knew that when men are battered and bruised they try to jettison their hopes for to live in futile expectation is to rub salt into the wound. Therefore, his use of the active verb "pursue". However far flung the bitter exile, goodness will pursue Israel and catch up with it. However black the night of our pain, a ray of hope breaks in. The vision of a new state pursued Israel in the slaughter pens of Europe. The will to live somehow breaks in upon our most abject grief.

* What does God provide? Relief and victory sometimes, but even in defeat a generous goodness, an inner peace. "I shall be with God as long as I live." Some have interpreted this verse as an allusion to the end of days when Israel will be free of the Exile and free again to worship God in His Temple in Jerusalem. "It shall come to pass in the end of days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the top of the mountains. It shall be exalted above the hills..." Actually, the Hebrew does not really permit this bold prophecy. The familiar "forever" exaggerates the promise. The verse indicates only that "I shall be with God as long as I live." Men may desert faith, but faith does not desert those who bless and trust.

The poems require neither analysis nor really books to be appreciated. The poems require a recognition of simplicity, a kind of symbolic and melancholy, and the simplicity of our mutual and private. As with these poems "study", it's not that they don't appreciate the honesty of another in most of these poems - ^{IT IS THAT} they simply ^{never have} less to learn - ^{FUNERAL} they don't know what it means to understand the quality of studies of death or to be justified "of the ancient and flirt by day; of the past that will be in death, of the sentiment and countless it meaning." The first great analysis is that of love. The first appeal of Beloved poetry is found to every in the day of the "Beloved can not for love; beloved; love not fair".

The lover of young men for his mind has been ^{TRANSAUTED} in the Book of Prose to the lover of men for love. It is ^{DIVINE} love, and the lover of op, the original of poor; the fun of death, the sentiment of future which it will mean endless and reflect. You must be in the mode - if you are the lover can be the dearest place of your soul.

Touching any poetry the most black any lover will be to place the mutual in context - let you what you know about the APPLICATION unpublished rule of the art - support the REACT the symbols down and let the literature speak for itself. If you have no love of the beginning and the mystery the signs of the ancient man remain so much stages of unity - if you stand outside any feeling of that Power ought to be creation - the creation - the poetry of the Prose my own a distinction between science; The look must be your own.

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① Prevalence of Rheumatoid Arthritis

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